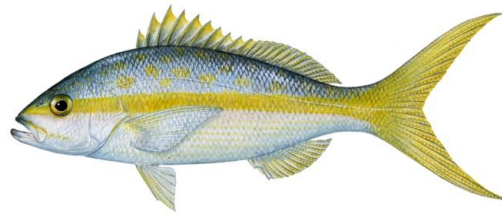


**FINAL RULE TO ESTABLISH A BAG LIMIT FOR VERMILION  
SNAPPER, SET THE ANNUAL CATCH LIMIT FOR YELLOWTAIL  
SNAPPER, AND ELIMINATE THE REEF FISH VENTING TOOL  
REQUIREMENT  
Framework Action**

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

***August 2013***



**What is being implemented in this rule?**

- A bag limit of 10 vermillion snapper will be included in the 20-reef fish aggregate bag limit.
- The yellowtail snapper annual catch limit will be increased from 725,000 pounds to 901,125 pounds.
- The requirement to use venting tools when fishing for reef fish is eliminated.

**When do these regulations go into effect?**

- These regulations are effective September 3, 2013.

**Why does the vermillion snapper harvest need to be restricted?**

- The Gulf of Mexico vermillion snapper stock is considered healthy.
- A recent stock assessment indicated the vermillion snapper annual catch limit could be increased, but the last year of data used in the assessment was from 2010.
- The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) heard testimony from fishermen and it's Advisory Panel who observed signs over the past few years the vermillion snapper stock may be declining.
- To reduce the risk of overfishing (too many fish being caught), the Gulf Council decided not to increase the vermillion snapper annual catch limit.
- The vermillion snapper fishery will close for both commercial and recreational sectors if the annual catch limit is met or projected to be met.
- Recreational landings have been increasing in recent years (with the exception of 2010).
- To reduce the chances of closing vermillion snapper fishing early, the Council recommended limiting the recreational sector to 10 fish within the 20-fish aggregate bag limit

***Species in the Reef Fish  
20-Fish Aggregate Bag  
Limit***

- Vermilion Snapper
- Lane Snapper
- Almaco Jack
- Gray Triggerfish
- Tilefish
- Goldface Tilefish
- Blueline Tilefish

### Why can the yellowtail snapper annual catch limit be increased?

- The current annual catch limit for Gulf yellowtail snapper is 725,000 pounds and is based on past landings data.
- A 2012 assessment indicated that the U.S. yellowtail snapper population was healthy.
- The assessment for the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico regions were combined because yellowtail snapper in the southeast U.S. is considered a single population.
- The population is split with 75% of the allowable harvest going to the South Atlantic and 25% of the allowable harvest going to the Gulf.
- The Scientific and Statistical Committees of the South Atlantic and Gulf Fishery Management Councils reviewed the population assessment and recommended the catch can be increased.
- The Gulf share of the acceptable biological catch is 1.0125 million pounds.
- To account for management uncertainty, the Gulf Council set the annual catch limit at 901,125 pounds.
- Any changes to the management of the South Atlantic portion of the population is being addressed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

#### *Annual Catch Limit*

The amount of fish that can be harvested each year for a species.

### What is a venting tool?

- Many marine reef fish have a gas-filled swim bladder that controls buoyancy to allow the fish to maintain a certain depth in the water column.
- When a fish is retrieved from deeper waters, the gas in the swimbladder can over-expand and fill the body cavity with trapped gases when the fish is brought quickly to the surface.
- A venting tool is a device to deflate the body cavity so a fish has an easier time swimming back down to the bottom.

### Why do the venting tool requirements need to be changed?

- The venting tool requirement was implemented with two other measures (non-stainless steel circle hooks and dehooking devices) to reduce the number of fish that die during the catch and release process.
- Recent research has questioned the usefulness of venting tools in preventing the deaths of released fish.
- Problems with the venting tool requirement include:
  - Being less effective for fish caught at deeper depths.
  - Fish caught in shallow waters may not need to be vented, and attempts at venting may cause damage to fish by improper venting and increased handling times.
  - The current requirement interferes with using other devices such as fish descenders, which are devices that take the fish back to depth without venting.
- Because of these problems, the Gulf Council recommended the venting tool requirement be eliminated, but that fishermen should be encouraged to use devices that help fish survive the catch and release experience.

**Related Links:**

- [FB13-065: NOAA Announces a New Bag Limit for Vermilion Snapper, the Annual Catch Limit for Yellowtail Snapper, and the Elimination of the Venting Tool Requirement](#)
- [Final rule implementing vermilion snapper, yellowtail snapper, and venting tool regulations](#)
- [2013 Vermilion Snapper, Yellowtail Snapper, and Venting Tool Framework Action and Environmental Assessment](#)